

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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Renaissance bronze statuettes, plaquettes, portrait medals, and other decorative objects, selected from Ohio museums and private collections, will be exhibited at The Cleveland Museum of Art from September 24 through November 16.

The exhibition, organized by William D. Wixom, Curator of Medieval and Renaissance Decorative Arts at the Cleveland Museum, illustrates the richness of the small bronzes produced in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and France from the 15th through the early 17th century. It consists of more than 230 works from the Cleveland Museum, The Toledo Museum of Art, the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College, and a number of private collections in Ohio. A small group of late medieval secular and religious objects is included to illustrate the use of bronze in Europe prior to its great revival in the Renaissance.

Prominent in the exhibition are the statuettes which Renaissance patrons purchased to adorn their homes. According to Mr. Wixom, "The collecting of bronze statuary, an ancient practice which ceased after the fall of the Roman Empire, was revived in Italy during the 15th century as artists and scholars rediscovered the arts of ancient Greece and Rome. Classical scholars initiated the renewed interest in antique bronzes, some of them recently excavated.

"As the vogue for the antique spread, artists were encouraged to create new bronzes based on classical models. Some of these, like the 16th-century Florentine statuette of the Hercules Farnese in the exhibition, were reduced copies of ancient sculpture. Most, however, were free interpretations of classical and religious themes."

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Among the earliest and most important bronzes in this exhibition are a group of statuettes and reliefs from Padua in northern Italy, a center of classical studies and a leading producer of bronze decorative objects during the 15th and 16th centuries. Well represented in this group are the imaginative works of the Paduan sculptor Andrea Briosco, called Riccio. His sensitive handling of bronze can be seen in two reliefs, an Adoration of the Magi and a Satyress. The satyr, popular with Paduan artists, appears in several other works by Riccio, including an elaborate doorknocker.

Dating from the same period as the Paduan works are a group of statuettes of extremely high quality by Venetian sculptors: Hercules and the Nemean Lion and a Standing Man with a Vase (Aquarius?) by Camelio; Venus by Danese Cattaneo; and Venus Prudentia by Tullio Lombardo. A Madonna and Child by Sansovino is a rare signed work.

The important 16th-century Florentine sculptor, Giovanni Bologna, is represented by two superb statuettes--Mars, from the Cleveland Museum collection, and Samson and the Philistine, from the Toledo Museum. Bologna's sculpture is noted for its multiplicity of viewpoints, powerful movement, and highly polished surfaces. These same characteristics can be seen in works by two of his followers, the Netherlanders Hubert Gerhard and Adriaen de Vries.

Similar in theme to the statuettes are the plaquettes, small flat pieces of metal sculpted in relief on one side only. Usually designed to decorate utilitarian objects, they also could be collected simply as works of art. A large number of exquisitely modeled plaquettes in the exhibition are attributed to a north Italian artist active around 1500 who signed his works with the pseudonym Moderno. Plaquettes by the 16th-century Nuremberg artist Peter Flötner are among the German bronzes in the exhibition.

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3-renaissance bronzes

The German bronze statuette, which usually formed part of a larger work--such as a fountain or shrine--can be seen in two objects from the Nuremberg workshop of Peter Vischer the Younger: an inkwell with the figures of Adam and Eve, and an incense burner surmounted with a seated cherub. Although independent statuettes based on classical themes were a rarity in 16th-century Germany, genre and animal figures were popular with collectors. A favorite subject was the Sitting Dog Scratching Himself, exhibited here in a realistically modeled version from Innsbruck.

A group of portrait medals recalls the Renaissance fascination with the individual and his achievements. There are several fine examples by the 15th-century artist Antonio Pisano of Verona, called Pisanello, who revived this antique art and who is considered its greatest exponent. His commemorative medal for Leonello d'Este, Marquess of Ferrara, exhibits features typical of the Renaissance medal: on the front, or obverse, a portrait in profile; on the reverse, a personal or allegorical device which may have had meaning only to the owner. An exquisitely detailed portrait medal of Henry V and Marie de'Medici, dated 1603, is one of six outstanding examples by the greatest of French medallists, Guillaume Dupré.

Also noteworthy are a variety of functional objects of great artistic quality--mortars, oil lamps, candlesticks, inkwells, and writing caskets. Among the most beautiful are a pair of monumental incense burners, made in France in the 16th century possibly for the palace at Fontainebleau. Perhaps the most unusual objects are two small cannons or falconets cast during the 16th century and bearing the coats of arms of the popes Paul III and Paul IV.

Many of these bronzes, recent museum acquisitions and works in private collections, are published for the first time in the exhibition catalogue prepared by Mr. Wixom.

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4-renaissance bronzes

Most of the bronzes in the exhibition were cast by the lost wax method, then finished with chisels or other tools. A few bronzes are gilded; but the majority have been treated with chemical solutions or lacquers to produce attractive brown or black patinas--in emulation of ancient bronzes which had acquired a natural patina, or layer of corrosion, as a result of oxidation. In Riccio's workshop bronzes were coated with a black lacquer; the workshop of Giovanni Bologna favored a reddish translucent lacquer which gave a rich chestnut appearance to the bronze.

Gallery talks on the exhibition will be given at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 1, and Sunday, October 5. A lecture on Italian Bronze Statuettes by Charles H. F. Avery of the Department of Architecture and Sculpture at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London is scheduled for Sunday, October 5, at 3:30 p.m. in the Museum's lecture hall.

Renaissance Bronzes from Ohio Collections has been installed in the Museum's upper level exhibition gallery. Admission is free.

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